

*March 16, 2009
For Immediate Release*

Delaware Courts to Hold Information Sessions and Public Hearings on Self-Represented Litigants in Civil Cases

The Delaware Courts will hold an information session and public hearing on Thursday, March 26th at the William "Hicks" Anderson Community Center located at 501 N. Madison St., Wilmington, DE 19801. There will be an information session on the Delaware Courts beginning at 6:00 p.m. followed by the opportunity for the public to present testimony. The sessions and hearings are open to all, and anyone who would like to learn more about the Delaware Courts or who would like to testify about issues affecting litigants who do not have attorneys in civil cases is encouraged to attend. Civil cases include things such as custody, divorce, child support, consumer and landlord/tenant cases.

The information session and public hearing is being held by the Delaware Courts: Fairness for All Task Force in order to share information with the public about available resources and to identify areas of concern. The Task Force is particularly interested in learning about any challenges that self-represented civil litigants might face when trying to file papers or represent themselves in a civil case as well as suggestions for addressing those issues. Members of the public will be given up to three minutes each to testify. They may also present written testimony at the hearing or by sending it to the Delaware Courts: Fairness for All Task Force, ATTN: Stephanie Symons, Administrative Office of the Courts, 500 N. King Street, Suite 11600, Wilmington, DE 19801 or stephanie.symons@state.de.us.

Created by the Delaware Supreme Court, the Task Force is charged with promoting fairness and studying the needs of civil litigants who are not represented by attorneys. The Task Force will also oversee implementation of efforts by the court system to address identified concerns and needs. According to Task Force Co-Chair and Chief Magistrate Alan G. Davis, the work of the Task Force is critical given the increase in civil filings by self-represented litigants. "In the past decade, Delaware's Courts have experienced a dramatic increase in the number of self-represented litigants, especially in limited jurisdiction courts such as the Justice of the Peace Court and Family Court, where in a substantial portion of the cases there is at least one self-represented party," said Judge Davis. In creating the Task Force, the Delaware Supreme Court recognized this growing challenge and that a coordinated court system approach would be beneficial to self-represented litigants, the courts, and the community. "Although the Delaware Courts offer a number of services to assist self-represented litigants, such as self-help centers, informational materials, forms, and a limited pro bono legal assistance program, those without attorneys can still have difficulty navigating the court system. The Task Force is interested in identifying additional ways to improve perceptions of fairness and to assist self-represented litigants," said Task Force Co-Chair and State Court Administrator Patricia W. Griffin.

The Task Force will also hold information sessions and public hearings in Kent and Sussex Counties.

Kent County

Date: Monday, April 6, 2009

Time: 6:00 p.m. Information Session on the Delaware Courts followed by Public Testimony

Location: DELDOT Building (Farmington-Felton Room), 800 Bay Road, Dover, DE, 19901

Sussex County

Date: Monday, April 13, 2009

Time: 6:00 p.m. Information Session on the Delaware Courts followed by Public Testimony

Location: County Council Chambers, 2 The Circle, Georgetown, DE, 19947

For additional information about the Delaware Courts: Fairness for All Task Force, please see Delaware Supreme Court Administrative Directive 168:

<http://courts.delaware.gov/Courts/Supreme%20Court/Administrative%20Directives/?ad168.pdf>

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Delaware Courts: Fairness for All Task Force

Task Force Co-Chairs

Hon. Alan Davis
Chief Magistrate
Justice of the Peace Court

Hon. Patricia W. Griffin
State Court Administrator
Administrative Office of the Courts

Task Force Members

Michael Barlow, Esq.
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Miranda D. Clifton, Esq.
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Delaware Volunteer Legal Services, Inc.

Hon. Peter B. Jones
Family Court of the State of Delaware

Hon. Melanie George Marshall
Delaware House of Representatives

Michael Morton, Esq.
Michael P. Morton, P.A.

Hon. Calvin L. Scott, Jr.
Superior Court of Delaware

Hon. James A. Tull
Justice of the Peace Court # 13

Hon. Charles W. Welch, III
Court of Common Pleas